

to the immediate consideration of S. 4249, which is at the desk. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, if the Senator from Florida's bill were to pass, it would make routine domestic spending bills nearly impossible to be passed in the U.S. Senate, freezing spending at current levels.

I worry that the Senator from Florida believes the false impression that inflation does not impact the millions of Americans who benefit from non-defense discretionary programs. These are people who have to go to work every single day and try to figure out if they are going to have enough money to put groceries on their table. This bill would make things worse for the American people, not better.

As an example, this year, the cost of the veterans medical care system is expected to grow by \$21 billion. We have all heard the patriotic speeches of how we stand behind our veterans when they answer the call, but I wonder how many VA hospitals and clinics in Florida would have to be closed if this proposal were to be approved. I know there are a lot all over the country that would have to be closed.

Natural gas costs have grown by 35 percent this year. Do any of us who may be from a State where the weather can get warm want to tell our constituents who rely on the LIHEAP program to cool their homes "No, you don't need air conditioning because the money is not going to be there"?

If Florida is struck by another hurricane this summer and the Senator from Florida's constituents look to FEMA for fuel, food, and water, will the Senator tell his constituents "Sorry. Inflation was too high. You are on your own. We can't respond to that emergency"?

In 2017, Members on the other side of the aisle lined up to vote for a \$1.9 trillion tax cut for the wealthy—a tax cut that I believe has contributed to the inflation we now see in the country. There is nothing in this request to roll back those tax cuts. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4250

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I disagree with my colleague's objection, but I think this issue is too important not to try to get something done today.

So, instead of enacting this point of order when the CPI reaches 3 percent, how about we raise it to 8 percent? Our current CPI level is at 8.3 percent. We see how bad things are right now. When the CPI gets close to where we currently are—inflation levels that we haven't seen since the 1980s—that is

when this point of order would take effect.

At 8 percent inflation, we have reached a crisis point. It only stands to reason for Congress to start looking closely at every bill that increases the deficit. Such deficit-increasing bills should only be passed by Congress when absolutely needed.

Again, this point of order could be waived in the Senate with a two-thirds majority. I think this is reasonable and that we owe it to American families to start holding Congress accountable for the reckless spending that we know fuels inflation. Hopefully, my colleagues can agree to pinning this point of order to inflation at 8 percent.

As in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 4250, which is at the desk. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. LEAHY. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4251

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I was hoping we could arrive at a deal today, so let me try it one more time.

Eight percent inflation, I think, is really high. Remember that the Federal Reserve's target is 2 percent. I am just here to see if we can work something out and get something with which we can control excess spending. So I am going to try one more time. I want to give Democrats a chance in Congress to step up and fight for families all across America who are being devastated by raging inflation. There is no reason not to get this done.

My colleague objected to setting this point of order at 8 percent, but certainly no one can object to saying that, at 12 percent inflation, things need to change. Inflation over 12 percent would be an even bigger emergency. We haven't seen the CPI that high since Jimmy Carter.

Think about it this way: Things are really bad now, and 12 percent inflation would be a 50-percent increase over the already sky-high prices we are seeing today. Remember, we started at 3 percent. Now I am offering my colleague a point of order that can only be triggered at 12 percent.

As in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 4251, which is at the desk. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object—and I will—I think back over the years to some of the debates.

I remember, during the Reagan administration, when we heard so many speeches from President Reagan and his supporters on how they had to balance the budget. He did this at a time when he doubled and tripled the national debt, all the time telling everybody how they were balancing the budget.

Then I heard the objections to President Clinton's budget, saying that it didn't do the wonderful things that the Reagan budget did even though, of course, it gave the United States the first surplus it had had in decades.

Every so often, reality catches up with rhetoric, and because of that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I am clearly disappointed that we have had three opportunities to try to do something here that was going to try to stop the reckless spending that is causing this inflation.

I think all of us know that inflation is way too high. We also all know that reckless government spending is driving up the cost of inflation all across this country. I hope the Democrats in Washington will start figuring out how we can get inflation under control. It starts by living within our means. It starts by making sure that we live within our budget and that we stop wasting money.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, one of the ways you try to save money is, again, not with rhetoric but with reality.

I would urge everybody to join with us on both sides of the aisle who are working to get our appropriations bills together so we can reflect the actual needs and go forward with that. Again, rhetoric is easy; reality is a tad more difficult.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HAGERTY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Mr. HAGERTY. Mr. President, with the President of the United States soon to be departing on his first Asia trip, I rise to speak today about U.S. policy in the Indo-Pacific, an area of the world that I know very well, having served as U.S. Ambassador to Japan prior to joining the U.S. Senate.

While U.S. foreign policy in recent months has focused largely on Eastern Europe, we cannot take our attention away from our Nation's greatest strategic adversary, namely, the Chinese Communist Party. Confronting communist China is the essential responsibility of our time, as the China challenge—and how the United States and

our allies respond to it—will determine whether freedom or autocracy defines the 21st century. That is why I am pleased to see President Joe Biden investing the time and energy to travel to South Korea and to Japan this weekend.

I can tell you just how critical I believe this trip is because I made a trip similar to this just last month. In April, I led the first congressional delegation to visit Japan since the pandemic began. I was joined by my colleagues Senator BEN CARDIN of Maryland and Senator JOHN CORNYN of Texas.

During our 6 days in Japan, our bipartisan delegation met with the country's top leaders, including the Prime Minister, his Cabinet members, Parliamentarians, and top leaders from Japanese industry. I think it is fair to say that our delegation returned with a great sense of optimism—optimism about the opportunities that lie before our two nations to increase our cooperation diplomatically, militarily, economically, and technologically and, by so doing, strengthening our alliance.

While I certainly have policy disagreements with the current administration, I am hopeful that this is one area in which we can find common ground. The fates of our Nation and the world depend on it. This challenge, quite frankly, is just far too important to get wrong. So I am hopeful that President Biden will seize upon the opportunities presented to him in the Indo-Pacific region to confront the China challenge head-on and that this trip will provide him with a greater perspective to do so.

I am pleased to see this administration maintain a focus on the Indo-Pacific region, a focus that President Trump began and that I personally was proud to help lead from my diplomatic post in Tokyo. I also applaud President Biden for the actions that he has taken to engage the Quad at the leader level. Much more can be done.

In terms of strengthening our diplomatic cooperation, the United States should warmly welcome Japan's proactive leadership in response to recent international crises. Japan is the world's third largest economy and a major financial player on the world stage. Japan is a member of the G7.

In the days after Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, the Government of Japan joined by imposing strong, multilateral sanctions against Vladimir Putin's war machine.

Japan's support on sanctions is as important as it is necessary. I saw this firsthand when, as U.S. Ambassador to Japan, I worked with then-Prime Minister Abe and his administration in complying fully with U.S. secondary sanctions to end Japan's purchases of Iranian oil in 2018. With Japan's help, we dramatically reduced Iran's revenue stream and its ability to fund terror at that time. We see Japan's importance

today with regard to multilateral sanctions against Russia.

Going forward, the United States must do its utmost to ensure that Japan always has a seat at the table on major international issues.

Indeed, I was very pleased to see Foreign Minister Hayashi become the first Japanese Cabinet member to attend a NATO ministerial when he traveled to Brussels last April. And I am even more pleased to learn that Prime Minister Kishida is considering attending the NATO Summit in Spain next month.

Here, I see an opportunity for the United States to engage further with Japan and NATO by exploring new ways to expand high-level diplomatic interactions and information sharing.

When I made the suggestion to Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing in early May, I was glad to see that my suggestion was well received.

The second opportunity that I see is in the area of improving defense and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. The United States and Japan must further increase coordination on defense planning and procurement as Japan looks to significantly boost its spending on defense.

Japan has already begun the process of rewriting its national security strategy and its related national defense strategy. At the same time, leaders in Tokyo see growing support from the Japanese people to roughly double Japan's defense spending to 2 percent of GDP.

These developments come at a critical moment. Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party have their eyes set on Taiwan, and they are surely learning lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, North Korean Dictator Kim Jong Un continues to develop nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles as he poses grave and gathering threats to the United States and to our allies in the region.

Our nations, therefore, must act with great urgency to strengthen defense and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. In particular, the United States must encourage Japan to use their increased spending to field as rapidly as possible new defense capabilities that are mobile, lethal, and interoperable.

Japan must also significantly improve its cyber security capabilities and its ability to share intelligence and information with its allies. And it is critical that the American and Japanese militaries expand joint training exercises with one another.

I have had the honor of witnessing firsthand the success of our joint training exercises, and I encourage our nations to expand this invaluable training.

The third area where I see an opportunity is on energy security, an area in which we should be working together. This was the message that I heard last month in Japan as leaders expressed

concerns with America's current energy policies.

Several years ago, I worked hard to encourage Japan to make significant investments in LNG infrastructure to allow greater LNG imports from the United States in order to strengthen our two nations' energy security and our national security.

I hope President Biden's visit will underscore the significance of American strength as an energy exporter to enhance the security of our allies. But all members of the Quad must engage in the critical topic of energy security.

India is the world's biggest democracy and now has an opportunity to decrease its energy and military reliance on Russia, and Australia is a significant energy exporter.

When Secretary Blinken recently testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I pointed out to him that the Quad already has high-level working groups working on COVID-19 vaccines, infrastructure, critical and emerging technologies, space, cyber security, and environmental matters. But my argument to him was that adding a new working group in the Quad—one focused specifically on energy security—makes strong strategic sense, as energy security is inextricably linked to economic security and to our national security. Frankly, it is surprising to me that the Quad hasn't already made this issue a primary focus.

Secretary Blinken appeared to appreciate the suggestion, and I emphatically urge the administration to take this idea to heart and dedicate time and energy to discussing energy security in our Quad strategic grouping.

The fourth area of opportunity that I see is in technology. The United States and Japan already cooperate closely in this space. That was a point that I sought to underscore in many of our meetings with Japan's private sector leaders.

I see growing opportunities for our Quad partners to ensure our respective technology sectors continue to work together and to generate trusted alternatives in 5G, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and in other strategic technologies.

When I served as U.S. Ambassador to Japan, I helped the United States and Japanese Governments coordinate closely to counter Huawei and China's other heavily subsidized companies and to clear them from the 5G markets of our representative economies. This was important because Chinese companies like Huawei pose grave and growing national security and espionage risks.

Our U.S.-Japan strategy prevented Huawei and other Chinese Communist Party-directed technology firms from obtaining the global scale that they sought in their effort to dominate international markets.

It also created openings for firms in the United States, Japan, and partner countries to pursue trusted 5G alternatives in supply chains, including software-defined networks and ORAN technologies.

With each passing year, the technology competition with China is only intensifying. It is, therefore, imperative that the U.S.-Japan alliance and the Quad increase coordination and innovation in response to technological competition.

The fifth opportunity is in economic leadership in the Indo-Pacific. When President Biden visits the region, I expect him to speak more about the Indo-Pacific economic framework. It is clear that many of our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific are eager to see more U.S. economic leadership.

As a next step, the United States should take the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework's data provisions and turn them into a stand-alone, sector-specific free-trade agreement.

The executive branch should look closely at the U.S.-Japan Digital Trade Agreement of 2019 as a good starting point. This is the most comprehensive and high-standards agreement addressing digital trade barriers.

I was proud to help then-U.S. Trade Representative Bob Lighthizer negotiate this and other bilateral agreements with Japan. Our efforts brought about a more fair and reciprocal trading relationship between our two nations, helping not only our economies but also our workers.

The Biden administration has rightly maintained the Trump administration's tariffs on China as important leverage to uphold fair and reciprocal trade. This is a critical tool in our arsenal, and I hope the current administration continues to use it.

There certainly are other areas where the administration must hold the line against China. The administration could do more to hold communist China accountable for unleashing the COVID-19 pandemic upon the world. It also needs to press Beijing to stop the deadly flow of Chinese-origin fentanyl and fentanyl precursors from flowing across our southern border and killing more than 100,000 Americans a year through overdoses.

And we also know what is at stake when it comes to China's growing military threats against Taiwan. The last administration set a high standard on countering China, and I hope the current administration builds on that success.

I believe there is strong bipartisan consensus in Congress when it comes to the Indo-Pacific and when it comes to the rising opportunities that we see before us to further strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance and the Quad. So I urge President Biden to seize these growing opportunities that I have outlined when he travels to the Indo-Pacific. As the only former American Ambassador serving in this body and as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I stand ready to work with him as he does.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). The Senator from Maryland.

SMALL BUSINESS COVID RELIEF ACT OF 2022

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I take this time to review with my colleagues S. 4008, the Small Business COVID Relief Act of 2022—legislation that Senator SCHUMER has set up for action tomorrow.

I want to start by saying that this bill—and the underlining bill that it deals with, the Restaurant Revitalization Fund—was a bipartisan product in which Democrats and Republicans worked together to help an industry that was in desperate need, the restaurant industry. It provided relief for their revenue losses, and we were proud that we were able to get that passed.

The challenge was that after it was enacted, we provided \$28 billion for the restaurants under the Restaurant Revitalization Fund. In reality, that was not enough money to cover the demand, and we found that where close to 100,000 restaurants were able to qualify and receive funds under that program, 170,000 were shut down through no fault of their own.

So we went to work, Democrats and Republicans, in an effort to rectify that inequity and help an industry that was in desperate need.

We filed legislation in August of last year. And I am proud that it was bipartisan, joined by many of my Democratic colleagues and Republican colleagues. I want to single out Senator ROGER WICKER, who has been the real champion on making sure that we worked in a bipartisan manner. We were joined on the Republican side by Senator MURKOWSKI, Senator ERNST, Senator CASSIDY, Senator HYDE-SMITH, Senator COLLINS, and Senator BLUNT. And others have joined us during the process.

But I want to take you back a little bit before we filed that bill in August of last year. There was legislation filed that would replenish the funds at \$60 billion because we thought \$60 billion was going to be needed in order to complete the funding. I think Senator SINEMA led the effort in filing that legislation.

The difference between the bill that was filed for \$60 billion and the bill that we are going to be considering tomorrow is the bill tomorrow is \$48 billion less. We were able to reduce the amount of dollars that were needed in order to carry this out. Some restaurants have closed. We have tightened up the rules.

And we can not only do that for \$12 billion less than it was initially thought was going to be possible when we had bipartisan support last summer, but we are now able to expand it to other related industries—all of which have had bipartisan legislation in this body—to provide relief. These are industries that were shut down as a result of COVID-19. They had tremendous revenue losses and incurred tremendous debt in order to stay in business.

So we provided in this bill—for the same \$48 billion, we include help for our gyms. We include help for Minor

League Baseball, professional leagues. We provide money for music venues. We provide money for border businesses. We provide money for the bus industry. We were able to do all that, and we are still less money than the original bill that was filed last summer.

We did a couple more things in order to make sure this was done in a very fiscally conservative way. We were able to find some offsets. There were no offsets in those other bills. We found about \$5 billion of offsets that we put in this bill.

We did something else that was not in the original act. We required the SBA to bring in all the applications before they allocate any money. Now, we had them already in the restaurants. These are ones that qualified before. But in the other areas they will receive all the applications, and before they issue any checks, they have to make sure they have adequate resources. If they don't, there is a pro rata reduction so there is no further need for us to be concerned about replenishing the funds.

All those are improvements that were made on the original bipartisan legislation that was filed that is more considerate of the needs, less costly, and more efficient.

Now, we have other protections that are built into this legislation. A restaurant cannot double dip. They have to subtract the moneys that they received under the Paycheck Protection Program, either first or second round of funds, from what they would otherwise be qualified to receive. They have to have a revenue loss that they can document. So there are protections in the bill.

But I want to go to what is the major issue why we really need to make sure we get this done. Because of the way that this was administered, partly as a result of a court action, you had two restaurants side by side, identical in their needs, filing their applications on the same day. One was funded; one was not. The restaurant that was not funded, if it is still in business today, it is very likely that that restaurant owner is taking out loans in order to stay in business and is still trying to be competitive to that restaurant that is next door.

It is very possible that restaurant is having trouble getting help, as all restaurants are having trouble getting help, but cannot compete in salary with that restaurant that got the help and now has to compete and try to get workers, even though they didn't get the same financial assistance. So it is a matter of basic fairness.

I want to go one step further. We in the Congress tried to prioritize those restaurants in underserved communities and traditionally underserved small business owners. We set up a priority line for them to be able to get their help under the Restaurant Revitalization Fund. The court blocked